DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 036 894 24 EA 002 765

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TITLE Community Control of the Schools: A New Alternative.
INSTITUTION Michigan-Ohio Regional Educational Lab., Inc. Detroit, Mich.
SPONS AGENCY Office of Education (DHEW), Washington, D.C. Bureau of Research.
BUREAU NO BR-6-1465
PUB DATE Jun 69
CONTRACT OEC-3-7-061465-3071
NOTE 15p.

EDRS PRICE EDRS Price MF-$0.25 HC-$0.85
DESCRIPTORS Change Agents, *Community Control, *Community Involvement, Cultural Background, Cultural Pluralism, Curriculum Development, *Decentralization, Educational Strategies, Equal Education, Ghettos, Middle Class Values, *Power Structure, Program Proposals, *School Community Relationship, School Role

ABSTRACT

The concept of community control of schools differs from "decentralization" because community control stresses the possibility of the schools becoming an integral part of the total community. When professional educators are coupled with a cluster of special interest groups (e.g., book publishers, realtors, landowners, politicians), they form interlocking subsystems that can be described as the "Educational Complex." These interest groups often challenge one another for relative power. The concept of community control represents reform that would redistribute power outside the complex. The call for community control is interwoven in a revolutionary push by members of the Black City Reservation to determine their own destiny. The crisis in education is one of the community questioning the relevancy of its own existence in the educational complex. Meaningful community control can only come if we (1) develop alternative measures to determine whether stated objectives are reached, (2) devise methods for students to exercise power, (3) redistribute economic power, (4) restructure the school-community relationship, (5) develop inservice strategies for teachers and paraprofessionals, and (6) develcp processes for involving all persons concerned in planning and evaluating school programs. (DE)

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# COMMUNITY CONTROL OF THE SCHOOLS:

# A NEW ALTERNATIVE

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EA 002 765

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*Published by the Michigan-Ohio Regional Educational Laboratory, a private, non-profit corporation supported in part as a regional educational laboratory by funds from the United States Office of Education, Department of Health, Education, & Welfare. The opinions expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the position or policy of the Office of Education, and no official endorsement by the Office of Education should be inferred.*

June, 1969 6922Δ

# FOREWORD

In December of 1968, the Planning Division of MOREL recommended to the Program Committee of the MOREL Board of Directors that three pilot studies/exploratory activities be undertaken during the period of January-May, 1969. One of these was a treatment of causes of racism which would involve a self-study of racism by a group of white teachers. The second activity was to deal with the effects of racism through teacher-student education activities centered around an Afro American Instructional Curriculum Laboratory. The third exploratory activity recommended was to develop a set of processes and skills by which a school-community group could (together) identify "educational needs of the community" in a practical and usable manner. The latter was viewed as one aspect of development of an educationally sound "community control" program.

The first two exploratory activities were approved and have been conducted. The "community control" activity was not approved for several reasons, one of which was lack of time to conduct a meaningful activity. Another, more potent reason was the wide divergence of viewpoints extant then among MOREL Board members concerning the meaning, purposes and potential value of what is now termed "community control."

When it became evident that these different viewpoints could not be reconciled in time to conduct a pilot study, Mr. Hagood undertook the task of becoming as familiar as possible with the current literature and the actual programs now in operation in this field. Accordingly, he visited New York City to observe the three programs there and subsequently visited Philadelphia, Washington, D. C. and St. Louis as well. He has also carried on extensive discussions with interested school people and community people in Detroit, Grand Rapids, and Lansing, Michigan. The results of his readings, discussions and visits are presented in the following paper.

Mr. Hagood has described his perception of the nature of the problem which has caused many black people to bring forth the demand for "community control" and has related it to the older concept of the "community school" which is a more familiar term among educators. He has also (briefly) identified some of the kinds of development work which he sees as being necessary and desirable in order for community control to evolve in an effective fashion. Finally, he has listed a bibliography of reading material for those who wish to examine other thinking on the subject.

We feel that this paper is a valuable contribution to those who are concerned with making schools relevant to the poor and to black people.

Delmo Della-Dora, Director
Planning and Development

# I. INTRODUCTION

It must be understood that "decentralization of schools with community involvement or participation" is not the same thing as "community control of schools." "Community control of schools" includes a board duly elected by the local community, one having the power to make and enforce the following decisions:

a. Expenditure of funds--local, state, and federal
b. Hiring and firing of all staff
c. Site selection and naming of schools
d. Design and construction of schools, arranging and supervision of contracts
e. Purchasing power--for books, supplies, equipment, food service, etc.
f. Arranging for and supervision of contracts
g. School policy and curriculum design

The concept of "community control of schools" within a large school district is an educational strategy designed to increase efficiency and effectiveness on the part of schools by utilizing every opportunity to increase the possibility that the school will become an integrated part of the community. The school is viewed as a focal point for community planning, not just an educational center in the narrow sense. "Community control of schools" includes processes for decision-making authority on the part of the community/educators and reflects a change in structure, in effect, in content, in frequency and intensity of contact between community and educators. Along the power and relationship continuum, new strategies and processes for divisions of labor and functions for community, students, and educators are identified and developed. Emphasis is on the creative differences among parent/community and central administration rather than on similarities. For example, parents/community could recruit and screen paraprofessionals while the central administration could develop and provide an inservice training program for paraprofessionals.

"Community control of schools" would come close to the concepts of Joseph Hart and Preston Wilcox, namely that the community, in its totality, educates. Hart said that the whole community, including educators, would examine the total impact of the community on learning and together determine what role the schools would play in education for all its constituent members.[1*] Wilcox stated, "Lines of demarcation should be erased between the school and community: teachers' rooms replaced by community rooms; buildings should be open to the community, not closed to it; communities should be involved in problem solving from beginning to end, not just in campaigns to support 'school' efforts after the normal processes fail."[2]

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*Footnotes appear at the conclusion of this report.

## II. NEO-COLONIALISM

Available literature and popular opinion both make use of the term ghetto to depict the place where Blacks live, but a more accurate term would be Reservation.

The black people in the United States do not live in ghettos as many would lead us to believe, but on Black City Reservations. It is important to understand this when trying to come to grips with the concept of "community control of schools." The black reservation is the tract of public land set aside for use by black people. On this reservation Blacks are not allowed to own or control anything to any appreciable extent. These reservations are maintained, sanctioned, and perpetuated by white interest groups who live outside of the reservation. All decisions are made by these outside groups not for the benefit of the people, but for the maintenance of control for the benefit of the white majority group. However, it is true that some Blacks are recruited from the reservation and tricked into believing that they are members of the special interest group class with all the rights and privileges of Whites both physically and psychologically. These recruits are then sent back to the reservation as shining examples of what one can achieve if only he would let the interest groups guide his destiny. This form of oppressive control can be identified as white neo-colonialism.

Realizing this, it is very easy to see why the greatest threat to the concept of "community control of schhols" is not the professional monopoly operation alone. Rather, when the professionals are coupled with a well-known cluster of special interest groups (e.g., book publishers, realtors, landowners, politicians, general contractors, trade unions, teacher unions, etc.), they form interlocking subsystems which can truly be described as the Educational Complex. These different interest groups often challenge each other for power. (For example, teacher unions may close down a total school system to wir concessions from the central administration and the board of education.) Another example would be the politicking over the sale of land for proposed school sites. These intra-family fights, at best, represent a redistribution of power within the previously defined Educational Power Complex rather than a fundamental structure change or rehabilitation. Moreover, there is a fixed pattern of behavior which is unilaterally adhered to by the total family, the pattern requiring that any reform move afoot which would represent a redistribution of power outside of the family must be waylaid by any means necessary. The concept of "community control of schools" represents reform, which would redistribute power outside of the family.

## III. NEW MIDDLE CLASS

Dan Dodson writes:

> No nation can maintain the distinction of being democratic if it does not make allowances for cultural diversity. Such differences cannot be 'just tolerated;' they must be respected and encouraged so long as they have value for any segment of the citizenry. Thus, in a real sense, this opportunity to pursue autonomous goals is a measure of 'democratic.' No person can make his fullest contribution to the total scoiety with a feeling of compromise about 'who he is' because he is a minority group member.[3]

Groups of people (i.e., teachers, janitors, supervisors, etc.) once considered themselves the change agents of society--the same groups who were once considered trouble-makers and anarchists by the conservative forces of society--have forgotten that they also fought to make the Educational Power Complex relevant and accountable to their needs and desires; but this is a new day, and the spirit of these former changes has been replaced by the fear of change. The values these former agents of change now advocate are those of the conservative forces they once fought. They are now preoccupied with the maintenance of their newly won powers and security. This new middle-class is no longer the "out" class; its members are the gatekeepers of the status-quo. Caution and pragmatism have replaced the desires for creative risk-taking.

To paraphrase Preston Wilcox, our education system is bankrupt because it is being controlled by a group of conservative thinkers. White and Black students alike are not being taught citizenship and social responsibility. The emphasis is on an outdated concept of "scholarship," despite its lack of relevance in today's world.

## IV. PSYCHOLOGICAL TRAUMA

Any significant or meaningful discussion of the relationship between the reservation and the Educational Power Complex must deal with the psychological or emotional stress that may produce disordered feelings or behavior. Dodson recognizes this necessity when he writes:

> I would submit to you the hypothesis that it would be impossible for a youth who is a member of a group who is powerless in the community to grow and mature without trauma to his perception of himself because of the compromised position of his group in communal life.[4]

The Educational Power Complex is viewed by the people of the Black Reservation as being completely controlled by the gatekeepers of neo-colonialism in education--gatekeepers which include establishment agencies such as cities, central administration, teachers and even the U. S. Office of Education. These gatekeepers of education refuse to listen and to understand that they must deal with both the goal of equality for the future and the actual conditions of inequality of education of today. Hence, when they continue to talk in terms of emanicipating the people, the proposed emancipation is physical, but not psychologically oriented. The Blacks are told that they can be emancipated and thereby achieve (academically), but the conditions laid down require that they must commit cultural suicide, that is, they must allow themselves to be integrated, assimilated and stripped of their reservation ways. The children are bused from one side of town to the other; compensatory educational programs are forced upon them in the name of quality education. The children are told that they are "underprivileged" and "culturally deprived," when actually they have no privileges and they are culturally robbed.

## V. ACCOUNTABILITY

Because of the rigidity of the Educational Power Complex and its unwillingness to accept cultural pluralism as a meaningful educational strategy to improve self-concept, the black community has no other alternative than to demand <u>accountability</u>. Gordon defines accountability:

> By accountability we mean a procedure through which all aspects of the school are subject to evaluation and will result in change when deemed necessary. Accountability involves insuring that there are measures to determine whether or not specified objectives are reached in the children and channels for change exist when they are needed.[5]

Acceptance of the above definition of accountability as a frame of reference, leads to the conclusion that the Educational Power Complex has not been accountable to the black communities it serves. If you do not accept the above as a frame of reference, then I would suggest you either <u>stop here</u> or return to page one and begin again.

For those of you who are still with me, let us explore the word "accountability" and its relationship to "community control of schools." <u>Accountability</u> means that educators view themselves as being employed as an agent of the community, and that the community represents the power structure through which they operate if they operate at all. Thus the quality of education would be measured by those most affected. <u>Accountability</u> means students are not viewed as faceless products of big business, but as individuals. For, unlike big business, the Educational Power Complex does not have the option to recall a defective product once it has left the plant.

Evidence indicates, however, that the present system is turning out a defective product, especially among Negro and minority youth. Accountability means that since, by law, a community must hand over its children to an accredited Educational Complex until the age of sixteen, that that Complex accept responsibility and do just that--educate. Deutsch suggests that this responsibility can be met:

> Examination of the literature yields no explanation or justifications for any child with an intact brain, and who is not severely disturbed, not to learn all the basic scholastic skills.[6]

According to Deutsch, the failure of so many black and minority-group children to learn is the failure of the schools to develop curricula consistent with the environmental experiences of the children and their subsequent initial abilities and disabilities.

## VI. BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS

The Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders (1968) states:

> For many minorities, and particularly for the children of the racial ghetto, the schools have failed to provide the educational experience which could help overcome the effects of discrimination and deprivation.[7]

The call for "community control of schools" is interwoven in a revolutionary push by members of the Black Reservation to determine their own destiny. The issue is by no means strictly local. Inherent in the community-control concept is the belief that in order for education to be relevant to the needs and desires of the black community (thereby affecting black learning positively), the community schools must reflect the new black consciousness. Whether the Educational Power Complex agrees or disagrees is irrelevant, for the claiming of one's right to control one's own educational destiny is not debatable.

The call for community control of schools is not a concept that can be packaged, shelved or mailed from Reservation to Reservation to solve all ills of education. Rather, it is a concept which must be viewed as a meaningful educational alternative for development, an alternative to help bridge the polarized gap between the idealism of equality of education and the reality of a segregated de-humanizing model which is forced upon black people today. "Community control of schools" is not a surrender to the present segregated model, but a real attempt to deal with the social, economic, political, legal and educational realities. The reality is that an open society based on human rights is still far in the future. The black community knows it must deal with the fact that attempts to bring about meaningful integrated education have failed. This being the case, the black community feels that if the present Educational Power Complex is not going to provide for children from diverse backgrounds to attend the same school, it must exert its right as a change agent and demand a decision-making role in the educational process of its children.

## VII. "WE KNOW EVERYTHING" SYNDROME

The school is perhaps the single most important socializing agent of society outside of the home. The present function of education, in our highly developed industrial society, is to deliver a product which can function and "serve" society.

The crisis in education requires more than a devising a more equitable school-aid-formula, which must be given immediate attention, but one of the community questioning the relevancy of its own existence in the public Educational Power Complex. Surely education is predicated upon more than providing a product for an industrial society. Surely there is more to education that the maintenance of the status quo. What about people? There must be something more human and humane about the Educational Power Complex which has been created by the "gatekeepers. The questions of relevancy can only be addressed when educators get over the "We know everything" syndrome. Bringing about of "community control of schools," thereby assuring the community meaningful decision-making power, is essential to the process of relevancy.

The community has been willing to admit that it does not know all there is to know about curriculum, teaching skills, teaching methods, or even the running of schools. But are educators ready to admit that they do not know why one child learns and another does not, especially the black youth? Heretofore, educators have resisted the use of black student ideas. Are they also going to resist the use of community ideas? Are educators going to continue to put the burden of prcof on the Black Reservation? That is to say, "Prove that your ideas will work before we listen to you." If this is so, I submit that here is another example of neo-colonialism and the racist behavior and attitude of the institution of education, for the burden of proof is a criterion set for the Black People only; it is not applicable to the educational establishment. For example, even though evidence clearly indicates that current forms of compensatory educational programs have failed, millions of dollars continue to be poured into these programs.

The failure of the Educational Power Complex to come to grips with and to deal honestly with the question of re-distribution of power can only result in chaos. It will not take long for the community to realize that it does not have any real power under the proposed decentralization and community involvement/participation plans. The sad thing about this is that such an approach is unnecessary; there is no need for the hidden agenda. "Community control of schools" represents a golden opportunity for central administration, principals, parents, communities, students, teachers, and teachers' unions to come together and develop a new educational structure and process for the benefit of the children and all others involved.

## VIII. ROLE OF EDUCATORS

By the very nature of "community control of schools," the roles of educators will be different than they are now. Educators must answer the call for relevancy and radicalization of the present Educational Power Complex. The resources of educators are virtually unlimited, and educators must use these resources to work in concert with the community to help develop--

1. a sense of community in parents, educators and students
2. processes for involving all persons concerned in planning and evaluating school programs
3. plans for redistribution of power
4. plans for restructuring role-relationships of community, educators and students
5. criteria for selection of curriculum relevant to local community
6. the elimination of racial prejudice and discriminatory behavior on the part of educators working with black students
7. criteria for selection of teachers to teach in the inner-city school
8. a unit of study on the Blackenization of the curriculum
9. a local community-conflict-resolution center
10. criteria for the selection of local community boards

This is not the time for educators to debate the pro's and con's of "community control of schools," but a time for listening, because the question of the direction that community control will take in a particular community (and there may be many communities in a given municipality) can only be answered by the community affected.

David Spencer, Chairman of Local Governing Board I.S. 201 in New York, speaking for his community, put it this way, "We are not talking about downing any professionals, we are just trying to show that there is another way. That's all we are trying to show, that there's another way. Because the way that has been shown to us all these years ain't been working."

## IX. PROPOSED PROGRAMS IN NEED OF DEVELOPMENT

MOREL staff recommends that development agencies and others assist in bringing about meaningful effective community control through work in the following areas:

A. Develop alternative measures to determine whether or not specified objectives are reached. (To replace currently used tests and other measures.)
   1. Develop ways of helping community learn how to identify community needs and problems, and then translate them into educational programs and into social or civic action programs.
   2. Develop measures that determine if educational goals coincide with objectives, needs and desires of community, including its students.
   3. Develop ways of measurement which are not culturally loaded or racist in nature.

B. Develop methods for students to exercise power that is legally theirs.

   1. Examination of rights that are established by Constitution and by statute and from this determine what ought to be done in terms of school policies and practices.
   2. Develop an educational atmosphere in which students have a significant voice in the decision-making process in the classroom and school.
   3. Develop methods for students to give direction to curriculum and participate in selecting and using the most efficient materials and procedures for the curriculum.

C. Develop plans for redistribution of economic power.
   1. Address selves to that type of power redistribution which is necessary to develop an effective community educational program.
   2. Lay plans for a redistribution of power structure within the school system.
   3. Unit of study for black community on how power is presently used in society, how economic system is operated and controlled and the way in which this might change to give <u>more</u> Blacksself-determination economically.

D. Develop plans for restructuring role-relationships of community, educators, parents, and students.
   1. Begin with assumption that roles of community, educators, students and parents will be radically different than they are now. Define them in terms of "the community, as a whole, educates." The emphasis should focus on the creative differences rather than similarities.

2. What changes in role and role-relationship are necessary in structure so that community control can operate?
3. What (new) processes will guarantee continuing community involvement and also guarantee that local boards will remain relevant to the needs of students and community?

E. Develop inservice strategy for teachers selected to teach in the inner-city schools.
   1. Methods for teachers to learn about community and then keep selves currently aware in a way which leads to curriculum development.
   2. Processes to enable teachers to compare their values and goals with their teaching activities and to compare them with community-school values and goals.

F. Inservice strategy for training paraprofessionals
   1. Emphasis should shift from enforcing school regulations and baby-sitting to skill development and alternative feedback systems for use by teachers, students and other community members.
   2. Develop more meaningful educational roles for paraprofessionals leading to credit toward degrees.

G. Processes for involving all persons concerned in planning and evaluating school programs.
   1. Traditionally, planning and evaluating of school programs have used the current white experience as a frame of reference. However, what is important in the development of a community control program for the black community is the use of the black experience as a frame of reference. The degree of awareness and amount of involvement by community and students in decision-making will determine the amount of commitment by educators to achieving a community control educational program.
   2. What kinds of policies and practices are needed so that local community boards of education will not follow the pattern of current groups--how can they instead maintain meaningful contact with and involvement of the community, students, teachers, et al, in decision-making?

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